



NEWS AT A GLANCE

■ Israel imposed a full closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip amid threats of terrorist attacks in the days before the elections. In addition, some 20,000 security forces were deployed in areas across the country that were deemed sensitive. [Page 3]

■ Some leaders of Israel's fervently Orthodox community endorsed Benjamin Netanyahu in his bid to become Israel's next prime minister. The potentially critical support came as the polls continued to show a neck-and-neck race between Netanyahu and Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Both candidates claimed victory in the candidates' debate Sunday. [Page 3]

■ The Jewish Agency for Israel's office in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don reopened shortly after authorities closed it down last week. [Page 4]

■ Dr. Conrad Giles of Detroit was nominated to be the next president of the Council of Jewish Federations. The election will take place in November at the CJF General Assembly in Seattle.

■ A Palestinian human rights activist jailed for criticizing Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat's government reportedly said he plans to continue speaking out. Eyad Sarraj, head of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens Rights, was released after spending nine days in jail. [Page 4]

■ Israeli President Ezer Weizman said he was unhappy that the Supreme Court opened the way for women in combat units. His remarks came after the first female combat unit since the 1948 War of Independence graduated from basic training. [Page 4]

■ Haïke Grossman, who was a leader of the Jewish resistance against the Nazis in occupied Poland, died in Israel at the age of 76. [Page 4]

■ The Palestinian Authority drew up a plan dividing the West Bank and Gaza Strip into 16 districts, including one for Jerusalem. The Jerusalem district includes most Arab areas in eastern Jerusalem.

BEHIND THE HEADLINES

Young Israel resists effort by O.U. head to merge agencies

By Debra Nussbaum Cohen

NEW YORK (JTA) — Mandell Ganchrow wants Young Israel and he wants it badly.

Problem is, Young Israel does not want him.

Ganchrow, the president of the Orthodox Union, has been calling for a merger with the National Council of Young Israel since he was elected to head the flagship organization of the centrist Orthodox world in November 1994.

And at the O.U.'s annual dinner Sunday, he repeated his call.

"It is my hope that Young Israel leaders will come to the same conclusion that I have — enough of duplication, enough of waste, enough of competition. The time for merger is now, and it should be done in a brotherly, open and warm fashion," Ganchrow said in an interview after the dinner.

The leaders of Young Israel, however, are not interested.

"Absolutely under no circumstances" will Young Israel merge with the O.U., said Young Israel President Chaim Kaminetzky, citing divergent Orthodoxy ideologies that would make a merger impossible.

The conflict between the two Orthodox synagogue umbrella bodies reflects the cementing of ideological shifts in the Orthodox world and the inherent tension between the philosophies that each organization's leader says he represents.

Ganchrow says 90 percent of Young Israel-affiliated congregations share the same centrist religious philosophy as O.U. member congregations.

But Kaminetzky sharply disagrees, saying that Young Israel's philosophy is a more right-wing interpretation of what Orthodoxy requires of its adherents and a more aggressive Zionist nationalism.

Although secret merger talks dating back eight years broke off about 18 months ago, Ganchrow is optimistic about an eventual merger.

"I would love it to come from the top, and I still hope it could happen. But if it doesn't happen that way, I'm calling for a grass-roots type of reaction," Ganchrow said. When 50 Young Israel synagogues are O.U. members, "that reaction will be inevitable."

'Better and different'

At the O.U.'s dinner, Ganchrow announced that the O.U. recently accepted into membership their 29th and 30th Young Israel synagogues and said he expects to achieve his goal of 50 in two years.

But this trend has not weakened Young Israel's membership ranks, as all the synagogues joining O.U. have maintained their Young Israel affiliation.

"Obviously we are better and different" than the O.U., Kaminetzky said in an interview.

"We know who our rabbinic leaders are. I don't believe that other Orthodox organizations have rabbinic input into their organizational life."

Young Israel synagogues have closed parking lots on Shabbat and holy days, Kaminetzky said, and all member congregations have mechitzahs, the walls that separate men from women in Orthodox synagogues so that, during their prayers, men are not distracted by the women.

Ganchrow said the O.U. dropped six congregations because they refused to install mechitzahs, but four of the O.U.'s thousand members still do not have mechitzahs.

They remain O.U. members "because they have youth groups and we'd be afraid that the Conservative movement would come in and take them over" if the O.U., and its National Conference of Synagogue Youth, dropped them, he said.

But in any case, "We don't check the tzitzit of every Jew," Ganchrow said. Kaminetzky, however, said that at Young Israel, "we do check people's tzitzit."

"We have very strict requirements and watch our synagogues the way you watch your children," he said.

The two organizations also diverge on the ways they approach Israel

advocacy. Young Israel is ardent in its defense of Jewish settlers in the West Bank, Gaza and Golan Heights and has organized demonstrations on their behalf.

The O.U.'s approach is to work with the Israeli government, which "doesn't mean that we agree with them," said Ganchrow.

The O.U. meets with Israeli prime ministers "to present the arguments on behalf of everything our community believes in, including an undivided Jerusalem and the sanctity of the sites in Hebron and the Temple Mount," he said.

"You don't always have to represent your people with vehemence and loud noises and demonstrations to do a good job," said Ganchrow.

Ganchrow said he proudly calls himself a modern Orthodox Jew, a term that has recently fallen out of widespread use in favor of the term "centrist Orthodox."

He acknowledged that modern Orthodox organizations have lost the power to steer the philosophical direction of the Orthodox world.

"We have lost the moral center to the right, and I am working feverishly to keep the O.U. on the center path," Ganchrow said. "Those of us who consider ourselves centrist are no less Orthodox Jews than anyone else.

"How religious a person is is between that person and God. We don't have parking lot police. Our goal is to provide an Orthodox service and to hope that the standard of each and every Jew will be improved."

The merger discussions ended some 18 months ago when Young Israel's board of directors made it clear that it was not interested, according to Kaminetzky.

Ganchrow said Young Israel got "scared by the diversity and size of the two organizations, that they might be submerged." And at one level, he is probably right, say people familiar with the discussions.

The O.U. has an annual budget of about \$20 million, 800 employees and about 1,000 member synagogues. The National Council of Young Israel has a budget of about \$1.5 million, 18 employees and 146 member synagogues.

Competition in kashrut supervision

Just over half of the O.U.'s budget comes from traditional fund raising. The rest comes from its kashrut division, which supervises 150,000 different items produced by 3,000 food production plants, Ganchrow said.

Young Israel is now working hard to get into the highly profitable kashrut business, too.

Just before Passover, it struck a deal with the Star-K supervision agency, which is based in Baltimore, to market the agency's services. In the last two months, a dozen food producers have signed on with Star-K through Young Israel, said Kaminetzky.

"Some have come to us that are unhappy with other certification agencies, including the O.U.," said Rabbi Pesach Lerner, national executive director of Young Israel.

The O.U. does not feel threatened, said Ganchrow. "We have name recognition. We're twice as large as all the other kashrus organizations put together."

"We've never, ever been interested in a monopoly. We have always worked with every single legitimate kashrus organization, we work together and have always gone out of our way to support local Vaads (supervision agencies)," he said.

But "our problem was the question of confusion," he said. "We don't want competition that will confuse the public, people trying to undersell and make a business out of it."

Why is Ganchrow so ardently pursuing an organization that has made it clear it wants little to do with him?

A high-ranking Young Israel source said that until about five years ago, Young Israel was "a sleeping giant."

"Now Young Israel is increasing its shuls and rabbinic training and services to congregations, and the big guy on the block isn't any longer the big guy," he said.

Ganchrow said he feels compelled by his sense of communal responsibility.

"Maybe it's not the most politic thing to stand up and say we should have a merger, but I think the Orthodox community needs it. A few people are going to be upset, but we have to do the right thing," he said.

Said Kaminetzky, "The organizations need to be different. We're the only ones who can get to a rabbinic conference the deans of Yeshiva University and members of the [fervently Orthodox] Agudah.

"The American Orthodox community needs that uniqueness." □

Israeli legislators implore Costa Rica to deport Koziy

By Brian Harris

SAN JOSE, Costa Rica (JTA) — Calling his presence here a "travesty of justice," 72 members of the Israeli Knesset have called on Costa Rica to expel accused war criminal Bodhan Koziy.

Joining in a campaign launched earlier this year by the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, members of every party in the Knesset except the Arab Democratic Party signed a letter to Costa Rican President Jose Maria Figueres asking that Koziy be declared a persona non grata and deported.

The letter was presented this week to Costa Rica's ambassador to Israel, Manuel Lopez.

Koziy, 73, a Ukrainian police official during World War II, has been accused of war crimes stemming from his collaboration with the Nazi occupation of Ukraine.

In 1982, Koziy, the owner of a Florida motel, was stripped of his U.S. citizenship. The U.S. Justice Department obtained a court order to deport him in 1984, but he fled to Costa Rica.

Officials in the former Soviet Union accused Koziy of killing Jewish children and their parents.

But he was never extradited there by Costa Rica because Soviet officials, saying that they had no influence over Ukrainian courts, could not promise Costa Rica that Koziy would not face the death penalty.

The Knesset letter is the first from Israeli legislators regarding Koziy.

But it is not intended to disrupt the normally cordial relations between Costa Rica and Israel, said Efraim Zuroff, director of the Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office. "No one is saying Costa Rica is a bad place," he said. "It's just that we have this one problem."

Figueres and Foreign Minister Fernando Naranjo were in Taiwan this week on an official state visit and could not be reached for comment.

Both have said Costa Rica would not unilaterally expel Koziy, but would study an extradition request.

No country has recently expressed an interest in seeking his extradition.

In August, Rep. Michael McNulty (D-N.Y.) personally handed a letter signed by 60 other congressmen to Figueres that said, "Judges in the United States and prosecutors in Germany affirmed that Koziy was a Nazi policeman in Ukraine, where he shot and killed — amongst others — a 4-year-old."

In June 1994, the World Jewish Congress began a campaign to oust Koziy from Costa Rica. But the campaign subsided after reports from Kiev indicated that the sole surviving witness against Koziy had recanted her story. □

Big debate sheds little light on down-to-wire race in Israel*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Officials from both the Labor and Likud camps claimed victory in Sunday night's debate between Prime Minister Shimon Peres and Likud leader Benjamin Netanyahu.

But political analysts said the debate had a negligible effect on the centrist segment of the Israeli electorate that still remained undecided over whom to back in the race for prime minister.

Meanwhile, one day after the debate, Netanyahu picked up what could prove to be critical support from leaders of the fervently Orthodox community, which makes up about 8 percent of the electorate.

Conflicting opinion polls published in the Israeli media Monday underscored the closeness of the race.

A survey in the Israeli daily Ma'ariv gave Peres a 4 percent lead over Netanyahu.

But Yediot Achronot published a different poll, giving Netanyahu the same edge over his Labor rival.

During the 30-minute televised debate, the candidates focused on the two issues that dominated the campaign: peace and security. Providing few surprises, both candidates stuck to the political themes they have voiced throughout the campaign.

Peres stressed his political experience and promised to pursue the peace process begun by his predecessor, the late Yitzhak Rabin.

Netanyahu, 46, hammered at what he said was Peres' failure to ensure the personal security of Israelis.

The telegenic Netanyahu directly addressed Peres throughout the debate, charging him with "bringing our security to an unprecedented low."

"Our children are afraid to get on a bus," Netanyahu said, referring to the series of Hamas suicide bombings in late February and early March that killed 59 innocent people and wounded some 220 others.

Peres in turn charged the Likud with running a campaign that tried to "scare people, to sow fear."

The prime minister did his best to ignore Netanyahu throughout the debate.

But in his opening statement he responded to Likud campaign charges that he planned to divide Jerusalem in a final peace agreement with the Palestinians.

"We united Jerusalem, and it will remain united," he said.

Questions about adultery, age

The two candidates fielded questions from journalist Dan Margalit, who served as moderator.

Regardless of the questions posed, the candidates always seemed to return to their main themes.

Margalit, for instance, brought up a 1993 scandal in which Netanyahu admitted on television to cheating on his wife.

"It was a mistake," Netanyahu said, then added: "But the pain I caused my family was nothing like the pain Mr. Peres' policies are causing the whole nation."

When the 72-year-old Peres was asked whether his age could hamper his ability to perform as prime minister, Peres said his health was good, then added: "There are younger people, with old ideas."

Political analysts said that while the debate provided some interesting viewing, no real political gain was achieved by either party.

"Both candidates played it safe," said Menahem Hoffnung, a political scientist at Hebrew University. "They tried most not to make mistakes."

"Netanyahu focused more on why people should

not vote for Peres, than on why they should vote for him. He also was not specific about his own programs.

"Shimon Peres also failed to give real answers to questions on his future policy regarding the Palestinian autonomy, Jewish settlements and Jerusalem."

Meanwhile, fervently Orthodox spiritual leader Rabbi Eliezer Schach reportedly summoned representatives of the Degel HaTorah Party and announced his decision to back Netanyahu.

Other leading rabbis published a ruling Monday calling on their followers to prefer the candidate "whose party was closer to fulfilling the religious spirit and tradition of Israel." □

Israeli security on high alert amid threats of election terror*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli security forces were on full alert this week to coincide with the national elections.

Taking seriously repeated threats of terror attacks timed to coincide with the balloting, authorities deployed some 20,000 Israeli police and soldiers in sensitive areas across the country.

They also imposed a full closure on the West Bank and Gaza Strip that was expected to last at least until Wednesday's elections.

The closure, initially imposed after the first of four Hamas suicide attacks in Israel in late February and early March, had been relaxed slightly in recent weeks to allow older Palestinians to work in Israel and to allow the transfer of goods between Israel and the territories.

But the army reinstated full restrictions over the weekend, suspending all work permits to Palestinian laborers and preventing the transfers of all goods in and out of the territories.

Exceptions would only be made for senior Palestinian officials and medical emergencies, said an army spokesman. Security sources were also reportedly considering imposing an internal closure within the territories to prevent travel between Palestinian towns and villages.

The tightened security measures came amid conflicting signals from the Islamic fundamentalist Hamas movement about future terrorist attacks.

A declaration to continue such attacks came in a leaflet distributed Saturday in Gaza. But this followed reports that the jailed leader of Hamas, Sheik Ahmed Yassin, had called for a halt in terror attacks against Israeli civilians.

Israeli security officials allowed local Hamas leaders and two of Yassin's sons to visit him in jail in an effort to persuade him to issue an appeal to end the terrorist attacks.

A Hamas official reportedly said that the movement's leaders had decided to stop terrorist attacks until the end of the final-status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, and that Yassin shared this view.

But an Israeli security official who was present during the visit said Yassin, who was jailed for life by Israel in 1989 in connection with the kidnapping and murder of two Israeli soldiers, refused to issue a call to end all terror attacks.

One of the Hamas leaders who visited Yassin in jail, Mohammed Zahar, last week called on Hamas not to carry out any terrorist attacks before the Israeli elections so as not to be viewed as a political tool of one Israeli party or another.

The leaflet distributed Saturday left the clear impression that some segments of Hamas were still in disagreement over the use of terror as a political tactic. □

Detroit-area Nazi loses citizenship*By Heather Camlot*

NEW YORK (JTA) — A Detroit-area man was stripped of his U.S. citizenship last week because of his service as an armed SS guard at the Auschwitz and Sachsenhausen concentration camps during World War II.

The ruling by U.S. District Judge Horace Gilmore on May 22 clears the way for the U.S. government to begin the process to deport Ferdinand Hammer, 74.

The government charged in December 1994 that Hammer, a retired foundry supervisor, served in the SS Death's Head Battalion as an armed guard at the camps and on prisoner transports between camps.

Hammer was born in Croatia and came to the United States in 1955. When he applied for citizenship in 1963, he signed an affidavit specifically stating that he had not served as a camp guard and that he had never sent anyone to a concentration camp.

The court found that Hammer willfully concealed his wartime activities to gain entrance into the United States. Evidence included prison transfer records, found in Russian and German archives, with Hammer's name.

The deportation hearing could take several months.

Hammer is expected to appeal the denaturalization ruling. □

Palestinians release activist*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Palestinian security officials have released a Palestinian human rights activist who was detained after he criticized Yasser Arafat's self-rule government.

Eyad Sarraj, who was released Sunday night after spending nine days in a Gaza City jail, said Monday that he planned to continue speaking out.

Sarraj, head of the Palestinian Independent Commission for Citizens Rights, was arrested May 18 after saying in an interview with The New York Times that Arafat's Palestinian Authority was "corrupt, dictatorial and oppressive."

He was freed after his family released a letter with his signature that disavowed the comments attributed to him.

Palestinian Attorney General Khaled Kidreh reportedly said that Sarraj's release was ordered by Arafat and that he still could be tried on charges of libel, incitement and harming the public interest. □

Weizman averse to female units*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Israeli President Ezer Weizman said this week that he was unhappy that the Supreme Court opened the way for women in combat units.

During a visit to an army base Sunday, Weizman said women do not belong in combat units, just as women do not play with men in professional sports.

An all-female border police unit, the first female combat unit since the 1948 War of Independence, graduated last week from basic training. □

JAFI office in Russia reopens*By Lev Krichevsky*

MOSCOW (JTA) — The office of the Jewish Agency for Israel in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don has been reopened shortly after it was closed down by local authorities last week.

The office in Rostov-on-Don, about 650 miles south of Moscow, was the latest of several in southern Russia where authorities have recently suspended agency activities.

But Jewish leaders say they feel that pressures on agency operations in Russia are now being eased. □

U.S. group: Civilians deliberately hit*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A U.S.-based human rights group has charged both Israel and Hezbollah with deliberately targeting civilian areas during last month's cross-border fighting.

At a news conference May 22 in Jerusalem, officials from Human Rights Watch said both sides had "exhibited willful disregard of humanitarian law by directly targeting civilians" to obtain their military objectives.

Israel was sharply criticized by the United Nations last month, after it fired artillery shells on the Kana U.N. base in southern Lebanon.

The attack resulted in the deaths of at least 91 Lebanese civilians.

Israel maintained that it had no prior knowledge that refugees had taken shelter there and that their deaths were accidental.

In meetings with Human Rights Watch representatives, Israeli officials stressed that there were standing regulations in the Israel Defense Force not to target civilians.

The IDF also said Operation Grapes of Wrath, Israel's code-name for the 16-day shelling of Lebanon last month, was undertaken in self-defense after Hezbollah launched repeated Katyusha rocket assaults on northern Israeli communities.

Hezbollah officials in Beirut said they would study the report's findings. □

Grossman, ex-Knesset member, dies*By Naomi Segal*

JERUSALEM (JTA) — Haike Grossman, a leader of the Jewish resistance against the Nazis in occupied Poland and a member of the Knesset for 20 years, died this week after a long illness.

Grossman, who was 76, died Sunday.

She was buried Monday at Kibbutz Evron in northern Israel, where she lived.

Grossman, who was born in Bialystock, Poland, chose to stay in Poland when the Germans invaded in 1939, even though she had an immigrant's permit from British authorities in Palestine.

As a leader of the left-wing Zionist movement Hashomer Hatzair, she participated in the Jewish uprisings in the Vilna and Bialystock ghettos.

Along with other survivors of the uprisings, she escaped and joined Jewish partisans.

In 1948, she immigrated to Israel, where she settled in Kibbutz Evron.

In 1968, she was elected to the Knesset as a representative of the left-wing Mapam Party, with which Hashomer Hatzair became affiliated that year.

In her 20 years as a legislator, she headed various parliamentary committees.

Grossman also served as deputy speaker of the Knesset.

She fell down a steep flight of stairs in 1993 and was in a coma for three years.

She died at the retirement home located on the kibbutz. □